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ABSTRACT

This paper examines parental involvement in schools and schooling. "Parents" in this case are interpreted broadly to include extended families and the variety of child caretakers. Building on existing literature, it offers some expanded conceptual frameworks with a view to enhancing subsequent intervention research, practice, and policy making. The first section, on society's agenda for involving the home, gives a rationale on intentional intervention. Explained are the respective agendas for involving the home--socialization, economic, political, and helping agendas. The second section focuses on the forms of involvement in schools. Reviewed are existing categorizations found in the literature. A continuum model differentiates types of involvement in terms of a system or individual function or both. The third section concerns the nature of barriers to involvement; institutional and impersonal barriers are addressed. The final section discusses general intervention concerns, steps, and strategies relating to enhancing involvement. The four major intervention steps to be planned, complemented, and evaluated are discussed: (1) organizing the institution for involvement; (2) inviting involvement; (3) facilitating involvement; and (4) maintaining involvement. (Contains 65 references.) (RR)

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Parents and Schools: An Intervention Perspective[1]

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Abstract

Parents and Schools: An Intervention Perspective

Increased home involvement in schools and schooling is a major focus for educational reform. As a basis for enhancing intervention research, practice, and policy agendas, the presentation explores (1) agendas underlying society's push for home involvement in schools and schooling, (2) different forms of home involvement, (3) barriers to involvement, and (4) intervention concerns, steps, and strategies.

Parents and Schools: An Intervention Perspective

Home involvement in schools is a prominent item on the education reform agenda for the 1990s. It is, of course, not a new concern. As Davies (1987) reminds us, the "questions and conflict about parent and community relationships to schools began in this country when schools began" (p. 147).

Reviews of the literature indicate widespread endorsement of parent involvement. As Epstein (1987) notes, "research findings accumulated over two decades ... show that ... parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account . . . " (pp. 119-120).

In 1988, I became part of the team that initiated the Kindergarten and Elementary Intervention Project (KEIP) in 24 Los Angeles area elementary schools targeted for dropout prevention programs. One component of KEIP is designed to provide parent education and explore ways to increase parents' school involvement with respect to their children's problems (Adelman & Taylor, 1990; Adelman, McIntosh, Nelson, & Taylor, 1991; Klimes-Dougan, Lopez, Adelman, & Nelson, 1991).

We began our work on KEIP's parent component by reviewing program descriptions and related resources (e.g., Ascher, 1988; Clark, 1984; Comer, 1984; Conoley, 1987; Davies, 1988; Epstein, 1987; Gordon & Breivogel, 1976; Hawley & Rosenholtz, 1983; Henderson, 1987; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Kagan, 1985; Lyons, Robbins,

& Smith, 1982; Marockie & Jones, 1987; Rich, 1985; Scott-Jones, 1987; Valentine & Stark, 1979; Wolfendale, 1983; Zigler et al., 1983). In addition to extensive advocacy of parent involvement, we found the beginnings of a promising conceptual and empirical literature relevant to intervening to enhance such involvement. Recent articles suggest increasing activity along these lines (e.g., Comer, 1988; Davies, 1991; Epstein, 1991; National Center for Education Statistics, 1990; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990; Swap, 1990).

Building on existing literature, the present paper offers some expanded conceptual frameworks with a view to enhancing subsequent intervention research, practice, and policy making. Specifically discussed are (1) agendas underlying society's push for home involvement in schools and schooling, (2) different forms of home involvement, (3) the nature of barriers to involvement, and (4) intervention concerns, steps, and strategies related to enhancing involvement.

(Note: In the ensuing discussion, "parent" should be interpreted broadly. Parent involvement and even the term family involvement are recognized as unduly restrictive in focus. Given extended families and the variety of child caretakers, the concern seems best described as involving the home.)

Society's Agendas for Involving the Home

In a sense, the desirability of home and community involvement in schools is a given in our society. Thus, a segment of the population is continually enmeshed in schooling

and is receptive to efforts to involve them. The focus here is not on this relatively small group, but on populations where outreach and ongoing encouragement are essential if home involvement in schools and schooling is to be established and maintained. Facilitating such involvement requires systematic programs and gives rise to all the issues and problems associated with intentional intervention (e.g., see Adelman & Taylor, 1988). An appreciation of programmatic considerations and concerns is aided by understanding the nature of (a) intervention rationales and (b) agendas underlying programs to involve the home.

Intervention rationales. As noted by Adelman and Taylor (1988):

> Intentional interventions are rationally based. That is, underlying such activity there is a rationale -- whether or not it is explicitly stated. A rationale is a framework outlining and shaping the nature of intervention aims and practices. It consists of views derived from theoretical, empirical, and philosophical sources. It incorporates general orientations or "models" of the causes of problems, of tasks to be accomplished, and of appropriate processes and outcomes of intervention (p. 655).

Stated boldly, underlying rationales for intervention consist of biases (e.g., assumptive ideas) which both guide and limit the nature of intervention. That is, rationales have major ramifications for intervention processes and outcomes (e.g.,

outcomes related to a person's positive and negative sense of competence, status, and well-being).

At the root of the matter are age old social and political concerns related to inevitable conflicts between individual and societal interests. Because of potential conflicts of interest, it is essential that the biases incorporated into an intervention rationale be clearly articulated and debated.

The problem of conflicting interests is reflected in the extensive concern raised about society's ability to exercise control through psychological and educational interventions (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 1988; Coles, 1978; Feinberg, 1973; Garbarino, Gaboury, Long, Grandjean, & Asp, 1982; Hobbs, 1975; Mnookin, 1985; Robinson, 1974). At one extreme, it is argued that there are times when society must put its needs ahead of individual citizens' rights by pursuing policies and practices for maintaining itself (e.g., compelling attendance at school, compelling parents to sign contracts with respect to involvement in their child's schooling). At the other extreme, it is argued that society should never jeopardize individuals' rights (e.g., use coercive procedures, invade privacy). For many persons, however, neither extreme is acceptable, especially given how they define what is in the best interests of minors and the society.

Without agreeing or disagreeing with either extreme, the importance of the debate can be appreciated. Specifically, it serves to heighten awareness about three basic problems. (1) No society is devoid of coercion in dealing with its members (e.g.,

no right or liberty is absolute), and coercion is especially likely when interventions are justified as serving a minor's best interests. (2) Interventions can be used to serve the vested interests of subgroups in a society at the expense of other subgroups (e.g., to place extra burdens on minorities, the poor, females, and legal minors and to deprive them of freedoms and rights). (3) Informed consent and due process of law are key to protecting individuals when there are conflicting interests (e.g., about who or what should be blamed for a problem and be expected to carry the brunt of corrective measures). If individuals and subgroups are to be protected from abuse by those with power to exercise direct or indirect control over them, awareness of these problems is essential, as is greater sensitivity to conflicts among those with vested interests in intervening (e.g., to increase parent involvement).

Agendas for involving the home. Given the preceding context, different intentions underlying intervention for home involvement in schools and schooling are worth highlighting. To clarify the point, interventions designed to involve the home are contrasted in terms of four broad agendas. One can be described as a socialization agenda. It encompasses efforts to use messages from the school as well as parent training to influence parent-caretaker attitudes toward schooling and to socialize parenting practices in order to facilitate schooling. Two can be designated as an economic agenda. Its intent is to facilitate schooling by involving the home as a supplementary resource to

compensate for budget limitations. Three is a political agenda focused on the role the home plays in making decisions about schools and schooling. Four is a helping agenda, the intent of which is to establish programs to aid those in the home in pursuing their own needs. Clearly, these four agendas are not mutually exclusive, as will be evident in the following brief discussion of each.

(1) Socialization agenda. Schools are societal institutions with prime responsibilities for socializing the young, ensuring the society's economic survival through provision of an adequately equipped work force, and preserving the political system. In pursuing society's interest in socializing children, schools try to socialize parents (e.g., influence parent attitudes and parenting practices). These efforts are seen in the widespread pressure exerted on parents to meet "basic obligations" and in the emphasis on parent "training".

Often, a school's agenda to socialize parents is quite compatible with the interests of the parents and their children. For instance, schools and parents want to minimize childrens' antisocial behavior and equip them with skills for the future. However, there are times when the school's socialization agenda comes into conflict with the home's agenda with respect to meeting other basic obligations and needs (e.g., the obligation to avoid causing or exacerbating a problem).

> Jose's family had come to the U.S.A. four years ago. His father worked as a gardener; his mother worked in the garment district. Neither parent was fluent in English; mother less so than father.

Jose's parents were called to school because of his misbehavior in the classroom. The teacher (who did not speak Spanish) informed them that she was having to use a range of behavioral management strategies to control Jose. However, for the strategies to really work, she said it also was important for the parents to use the same procedures at home. To learn these "parenting skills," the parents both were to attend one of the 6 week evening workshops the school was starting. They were assured the workshop was free, was available in English or Spanish, and there would be child care at the school if they needed it.

After meeting with the teacher, Jose's father, who had reluctantly come to the conference, told his wife she should attend the workshop -- but he would not. She understood that he saw it as her role -- not his -- but she was frightened; they fought about it. They had been fighting about a lot of things recently. In the end, she went, but her resentment toward her husband grew with every evening she had to attend the training sessions.

Over the next few months, the mother attempted to apply what she was told to do at the workshop. She withheld privileges and confined Jose to periods of "time out" whenever he didn't toe the line. At the same time, she felt his conduct at home had not been and was not currently that bad -- it was just the same spirited behavior his older brothers had shown at his age. Moreover, she knew he was upset by the increasingly frequent arguments she and her husband were having. She would have liked some help to know what to do about his and her own distress, but she didn't know how to get such help.

Instead of improving the situation, the control strategies seemed to make Jose more upset; he "acted out" more frequently and with escalating force. Soon, his mother found he would not listen to her and would run off when she tried to do what she had been told to do. She complained to her husband. He said it was her fault for pampering Jose. His solution was to beat the youngster.

To make matters worse, the teacher called to say she now felt that Jose should be taken to the doctor to determine whether he was hyperactive and in need of medication. This was too much for Jose's mother. She did not take him to the doctor, and she no longer responded to most calls and letters from the school.

Jose continued to be a problem at school and now at home, and his mother did not know what to do about it or who to turn to for help. When asked, Jose's teacher describes the parents as "hard to reach."

The preceding case raises many issues. For example, involvement of the home in cases such as Jose's usually is justified by the school as "in the best interests of the student and the others in the class." However, clearly there are different ways to understand the causes of and appropriate responses to Jose's misbehavior. By way of contrast, another analysis might suggest the problem lies in ill-conceived instructional practices and, therefore, might prescribe changing instruction rather than strategies focused on the misbehavior per se. Even given an evident need for home involvement, the way the mother was directed to parent training raises concerns about whether the processes were coercive. The question also arises as to whether the same procedures would have been used in discussing the problem, exploring alternative ways to solve it, and involving the mother in parent training, if the teacher had been dealing with a middle or higher income level family. And, there is concern that overemphasis in parent workshops on strategies for controlling children's behavior leads parents such as Jose's to pursue practices that do not appropriately address children's needs and may seriously exacerbate problems.

(2) Economic agenda. Home involvement is a recognized way of supplementing school resources. The home may be asked to contribute money, labor, knowledge, skills, or talent. Controversy arises about this agenda due to concerns regarding fairness, as well as in connection with professional guild complaints and public funding considerations. For example,

inequities among schools may be exacerbated because some schools can draw on the assets of higher income homes. Unions representing teachers and teacher assistants point to excessive use of parent (and other) volunteers as a factor affecting job availability and wage negotiations. And, increasing reliance on ad hoc sources of public support is seen as potentially counterproductive to mobilizing citizens and policy makers to provide an appropriate base of funding for public education.

(3) Political agenda. Another reason for involving parents is related to the politics of school decision making. This agenda is seen in the trend toward parents assuming some form of policy making "partnership" with the school (e.g., advisory and decision-making councils). In some cases, the intent apparently is to move parents into an equal partnership with school decision makers; in other instances, the aim appears to be one of giving the illusion that parents have a say or even demonstrating that parents are uninterested or unable to make sound policy.

The case of Head Start illustrates politics and policy related to parent involvement. As Valentine and Stark (1979) indicate, parent involvement policy in Head Start developed around three notions: parent education, parent participation, and parent control. "These three constructs signify different dimensions of social change: individual change and institutional, or 'systems,' change" (p. 308). Initially, the goal was to use parent involvement to produce institutional change through either parent participation or parent control. Over time, this goal was

displaced by individual change. "... national Head Start policy guidelines [in combination with local and federal initiatives to contain militancy] helped redirect parent involvement away from political organization toward a 'safe' combination of participatory decision-making and parent education" (p. 308).

(4) Helping agenda. .Prevailing agendas for involving the home emphasize meeting societal/school needs (Clark, 1983; Coleman, 1987; Educational Commission of the States, 1988; Epstein & Becker, 1982). It is not surprising, therefore, that little attention has been paid to schools helping parents meet their own needs. Schools do offer some activities (e.g., parent support groups, classes to teach them English as a second language) that may help parents and contribute to parent well-being (e.g., by improving their parenting or literacy skills). However, the rationale for expending resources on these activities usually is that they enhance parents' ability to play a greater role in improving schooling.

It seems reasonable to suggest that another reason for involving parents is to support their efforts to improve the quality of their lives (e.g., offering ways that Jose and his mother can become involved at school to receive the type of help they see as needed). Included here is the notion of the school providing a social setting for parents and, in the process, fostering a psychological sense of community (Sarason, 1972, 1982; also see Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989). There is, however, little to suggest that many schools design parent

involvement activities with such a "helping" agenda as their primary intent.

Given that interventions to enhance home involvement are a growth industry, the explicit and implicit underlying rationale for such involvement warrant articulation and debate. Hopefully, the preceding discussion illustrates the need for extensive exploration of social and political ramifications and clarification of policy and intervention implications. (For related discussions see Adelman & Taylor, 1988; Feinberg, 1973; Garbarino et al., 1982; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Lareau, 1987; McLaughlin & Shields, 1987; Mnookin, 1985; Robinson, 1974; Seeley, 1989; Swap, 1990; Valentine & Stark, 1979; Walberg, 1984.)

Forms of involvement

Various categorizations of parent involvement in schools are found in the literature (Anderson, 1983; Conoley, 1987; Davies, 1987; Epstein, 1987, 1988; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Loven, 1978). For example, Epstein (1988) has described five types:

(1) basic obligations of parents to children and school (e.g., providing food, clothing, shelter; assuring health and safety; providing child rearing and home training; providing school supplies and a place for doing school work; building positive home conditions for learning),

(2) basic obligations of school to children and family (e.g., using a variety of communication methods to inform parents about school schedules, events, policies and about children's

grades, test scores, daily performance; treating children justly and effectively -- including accounting for differences),

(3) parent involvement at school (e.g., assisting teachers and students with lessons, class trips; assisting administrators, teachers, and staff in cafeteria, library, computer labs; assisting organized parent groups in fund-raising, community relations, political awareness, program development; attending student assemblies, sports events; attending workshops, discussion groups, training sessions),

(4) parent involvement in learning activities at home (e.g., contributing to development of child's social and personal skills, basic academic skills, advanced skills by aiding with schoolwork, providing enrichment opportunities, and monitoring progress and problems),

(5) parent involvement in governance and advocacy (e.g., participating in decision making groups; advocating for improved schooling).

Davies (1987) identifies four types and extends the nature and scope of parent involvement as follows:

(1) coproduction or partnership (individual and collective activities in school or at home that contribute to school efforts to instruct pupils more effectively such as tutoring programs homework hotlines, teacher suggestions to the family as to how to reinforce classroom efforts, parent education about what the school is trying to do, home visitor programs, parent volunteers to assist teachers),

(2) decision making (ranging from parent participation in decisions about his or her child to involvement in planning, setting policies, assessing schools, deciding about budgeting, curriculum, personnel),

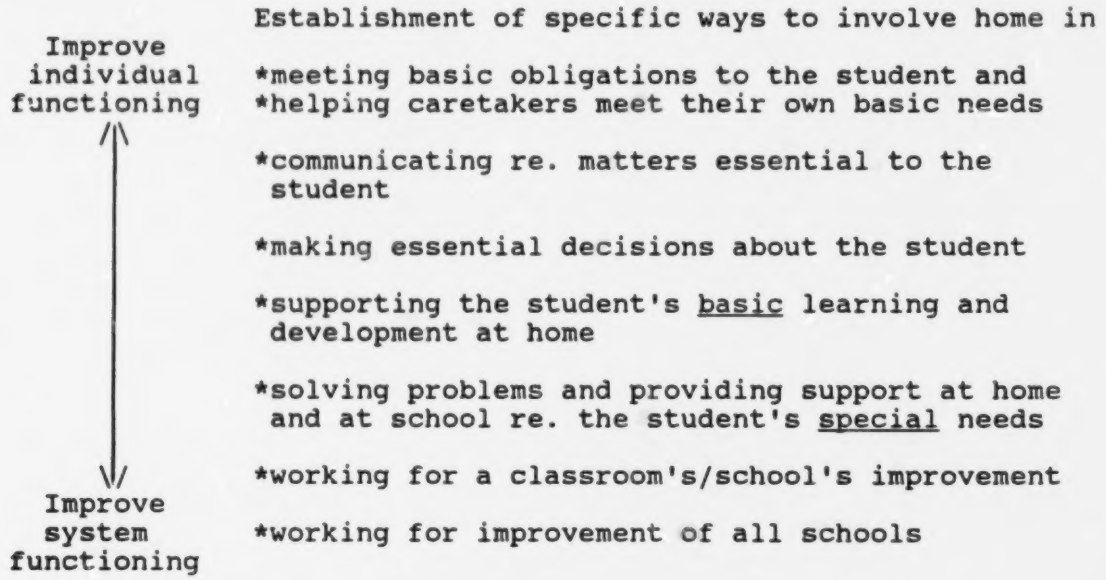
(3) citizen advocacy (e.g., case, class, political advocacy; citizen organizations to build public support for schools),

(4) parent choice (e.g., involvement in selecting his or her child's school).

Jackson and Cooper (1989) also extend the conceptualization of types of parent involvement by adding a sixth and seventh category to Epstein's five. The sixth, parent decision making (consumer activities), expands Davies' category of "parent choice" to a broader consumer role (e.g., parents becoming aware of the marketplace in terms of available educational choices and making the best arrangements feasible to ensure their child's success). Their seventh category, parent community networks, attempts to cover a wide variety of involvements that they see as using "the unique culture of the local parent community to help all parties concerned." In this category, they include developing schools as places for parents to congregate and solve problems, providing activities that improve parents' skills, schooling that builds on parents' cultural traditions, and efforts to facilitate networking relevant to parent agendas.

Existing categorizations provide a starting point for labeling clusters of activity, and they help highlight differences in the nature of parent involvement. In keeping with

reciprocal determinist views of functioning (see Bandura, 1978), a next reasonable conceptual step seems to be to differentiate types of involvement in terms of whether the focus is on improving the functioning of individuals (i.e., student, parent-caretaker), the system (e.g., classroom, school, district), or both. And, with respect to individual functioning, it seems worth distinguishing home involvement designed mainly to facilitate schooling from involvement intended primarily to help parents-caretakers per se. To these ends, we have found it useful to think in terms of a continuum of six categories ranging from home involvement focused on improving individual functioning to involvement aimed at improving the system (see below).


Establishment of specific ways to involve home in
Improve individual functioning
*meeting basic obligations to the student and *helping caretakers meet their own basic needs
*communicating re. matters essential to the student
*making essential decisions about the student
*supporting the student's basic learning and development at home
*solving problems and providing support at home and at school re. the student's special needs
*working for a classroom's/school's improvement
Improve system functioning
*working for improvement of all schools

As the above categorizations demonstrate, grouping types of activity is a helpful way to think about home involvement. Even though the categories are not totally discrete, such groupings

clearly aid in outlining the range of ways homes can be involved and in analyzing key differences in the nature of the activity.

It is important, however, to remember that categorization of types does not adequately highlight other significant differences, such as variations in degree, quality, and results of involvement. That is, parents might be involved in any combination of the above types of activity (although few would be involved in all). However, parents who help, for example, with homework or who participate in decision making differ in the frequency, level, and quality of their involvement; ensuing benefits and costs also differ. Therefore, in studying differences in home involvement, it is relevant to think at least about four other dimensions: (1) frequency, (2) level, (3) quality, and (4) impact (positive and negative).

Barriers to Involvement

Research on barriers to home involvement primarily has focused on variables hypothesized as interfering with the participation of specific subgroups (e.g., parents from lower socioeconomic and ethnic minority backgrounds). Within group variations rarely have been explored. Not surprisingly, a variety of familial, cultural, job, social class, communication, and school personnel attitude factors have been implicated (e.g., Comer, 1988; Davies, 1988; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Epstein, 1986, 1987; Klimes-Dougan, Lopez, Adelman, & Nelson, 1991; Pennekamp & Freeman, 1988; Tangri & Leitch, 1982). However, because the studies are correlational,

causal relationships have not been established. Equally as important, research in this area has limited itself to a narrowly conceived set of barriers.

Minimally, barriers to home-school involvements may be categorized as institutional, personal, or impersonal. Furthermore, each type may take the form of negative attitudes, lack of mechanisms/skills, or practical deterrents -- including lack of resources (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Institutional barriers encompass such concerns as inadequate resources (money, space, time), lack of interest or hostile attitudes toward parent involvement on the part of staff, administration, and community, and failure to establish and maintain formal parent involvement mechanisms and related skills. For example, there may be no school staff formally responsible for and committed to facilitating parent involvement; provisions for interacting with parents when they don't speak English may be inadequate; no resources may be devoted to upgrading the skills of staff with respect to enhancing parent involvement or the skills of parents for participating effectively.

Similar barriers occur on a more personal level. That is, there may be a lack of interest or hostile attitudes toward parent involvement on the part of specific individuals (administration, staff, parents, students); school personnel

and/or parents may lack requisite skills or find participation uncomfortable because it demands their time and other resources. For instance, specific teachers and parents may feel it is too much of an added burden to participate in parent involvement activities; others may feel threatened because they don't think they can make the necessary interpersonal connections because of racial, cultural, and language differences; still others do not perceive available activities as worth their time and effort.

Impersonal barriers to home and staff participation are commonplace and rather obvious. For example, there are practical problems related to work schedules, transportation, child care; skill deficiencies related to cultural differences and levels of literacy; lack of interest due to insufficient information about the importance of home involvement.

Overcoming barriers, of course, is a major concern in efforts to enhance home involvement. (And, clearly, lack of adequate financial resources for underwriting ways to overcome barriers can be viewed as perhaps the most fundamental barrier.) However, the nature and scope of intervention is not limited to the problem of overcoming barriers.

Intervening to Enhance Involvement

Efforts to enhance involvement build on an understanding of the various agendas for, forms of, and barriers to home involvement. Such an understanding, however, says relatively little about the specific nature and scope of intervention steps and strategies. Based on the intervention literature and work

accomplished to date as part of the KEIP program (Adelman & Taylor, 1990, 1992), the following brief presentation first reviews some fundamental intervention concerns that warrant special emphasis and then highlights a framework for approaching intervention.

A few general concerns. First, there is the matter of underlying rationale. Each school must come to grips with why and how they want to enhance home involvement and the implications of doing so. For instance, it is essential to recognize that successful efforts to increase such involvement may trigger a series of changes in power relationships. If the school actually is ready to share power, a developmental process is required that fosters parent interest and the specific skills needed to assume and maintain a decision making partnership. If those with current responsibility for school and district governance are not prepared to share their power, then they probably should not describe their intent as that of creating a home-school partnership. References to partnerships suggest parents will have a major role to play in decision making, and this is not likely to happen when the school's intent is mainly to have parents rubber stamp predefined objectives and processes.

Whether or not the aim is to establish a partnership, schools may want to consider the value of pursuing home involvement interventions in order to create a strong psychological sense of community within the school (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Sarason, 1972, 1982). This involves

creation of a setting where parents, school staff, and students want to and are able to interact with each other in mutually beneficial ways that lead to a special feeling of connection. To these ends, ways must be found to minimize transactions that make parents feel incompetent, blamed, or coerced. Concomitantly, procedures and settings must be designed to foster informal encounters, provide information and learning opportunities, enable social interactions, facilitate access to sources of social support (including linkage to local social services), encourage participation in decision making, and so forth. For example, parents might be encouraged to drop in, be volunteers, participate in publishing a community newsletter, organize social events such as breakfasts and pot luck dinners for families of students and staff, plan and attend learning workshops, meet with the teacher to learn more about their child's curriculum and interests, help initiate parent support and mutual aid groups and other social networks, share their heritage and interests, check out books and attend story hours at the school's library, go on field trips. It should be emphasized that creation of a psychological sense of community also encompasses finding ways to account for and celebrate cultural and individual diversity in the school community. In terms of agendas, the primary intent is seen as improving the quality of life for the participants -- with any impact on schooling seen as a secondary gain. However, moves toward fostering such a climate seem consistent with the the effective school literature's focus on the importance of a

school's climate/ethos/culture (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1985; Rutter, 1981).

Third, clearly procedures for improving home involvement must address as many institutional, personal, and impersonal barriers to involvement as feasible. For example, a fundamental reality is that working parents have relatively few hours to devote to school involvement. (Labor statistics suggest that as few as 7% of school-aged children live in a two parent household where there is only one wage earner.)

Moreover, involvement activities must be designed to account for a wide range of individual differences in interest and capability among those in the home and among school personnel. The diversity of knowledge, attitudes, and skills requires involvement options for those in the home (and school staff) that allow for participation in different ways and at different levels and frequencies (e.g., initial minimal involvement should be legitimized).

Finally, there is the problem of maintaining interventions to enhance home involvement. Available evidence indicates that there is a significant decrease in parent involvement as students get older (Epstein, 1987; Lucas & Lusthaus, 1978). The causes of this decrease have not been established, but it is associated with a decline in intervention efforts (Epstein, 1984). Thus, even if interventions are initially effective, how to maintain home involvement throughout a student's schooling remains

problematic.

Intervention steps and strategies. It is useful procedurally to think of parent involvement intervention as encompassing three sequential sets of strategies. The sequence begins with a broad focus. That is, the first set of strategies uses general, institutional procedures designed to recruit and facilitate participation of all who are ready, willing, and able. Then, the focus narrows to those who need just a bit more personalized contact (e.g., personal letters, phone invitations, highlighted information, contact and ongoing support from other parents) or a few more options to make participation more attractive. After this, to the degree feasible, the focus narrows down to parents who remain uninvolved and hard to connect with (e.g., because of an intense lack of interest or negative attitudes toward the school). These strategies continue to emphasize personalized contacts but add cost intensive special procedures.

The major intervention steps to be planned, implemented, and evaluated can be conceived as (1) institutional organization for involvement, (2) inviting involvement (e.g., outreach), (3) facilitating involvement, and (4) maintaining involvement. Each of these steps is highlighted below.

(1) Institutional organization for involvement. Currently, all school districts are committed to some form of parent involvement. Unfortunately, limited finances often mean that verbal commitments are not backed up with the resources necessary

to underwrite programs.

Regardless of district support, if homes are to become significantly involved at a school, research and experience suggest the following: on-site decision makers must (a) be committed to involving those in the home, (b) be clear about specific intent, (c) offer a range of ways for individuals to be involved, (d) be clear about what is required in recruiting, initiating and maintaining involvement, and (e) establish and institutionalize effective mechanisms dedicated to home involvement.

For instance, on-site decision makers probably should write out their rationale for involving the home and outline a range of initial and future participation options. Such documents would be of value not only to program developers, but to researchers and those concerned with public policy. These statements would be especially useful if they addressed such basic questions as: Is the intent just to use parents to facilitate school objectives or will some activities be designed primarily to benefit parents (e.g., personal interest and support groups)? and How much power should be ceded to parents (e.g., Is the eventual intent to involve interested parents fully in decision making councils)?

Once a rationale and outline of options are clarified, the next crucial step is to establish institutional mechanisms for carrying out plans to enhance home involvement -- including ways to overcome institutional barriers to such involvement. Logically, a major focus is on mechanisms to recruit, train, and

maintain a cadre of staff (and perhaps some parents) who have relevant interests and competence. Implied in all this is a lengthy commitment of significant resources.

(2) Inviting involvement. Based on motivational theory, how those in the home perceive a school is seen as a key intervention concern in efforts to involve the home (Adelman, 1992; Deci & Ryan, 1985). This concern includes whether the general atmosphere at the school is perceived as a welcoming one and whether the school is perceived as specifically inviting involvement.

It is not uncommon for parents to feel unwelcome at school. The problem can begin with their first contacts. It apparently is a familiar experience to encounter school office staff (and student assistants) whose demeanor seems unfriendly. The problem may be compounded by language barriers which make communication frustrating.

Beyond contacts with office staff, many parents come to school mainly when they are called in to discuss their child's learning and/or behavior difficulties. It is hard for even the most determined school personnel to dispel the discomfort of parents during such discussions.

Parents who feel unwelcome or "called on the carpet" can be expected to view the school as an inviting setting. Schools that want to facilitate positive involvement must both counter factors that make the setting uninviting and develop ways to make it attractive to parents. We have come to think of this as the

welcoming or invitation problem.

From a psychological perspective, the invitation problem is seen as requiring strategies that address attitudes school staff, students, and parents hold regarding parent involvement. That is, in most cases, involvement probably is best facilitated when attitudes are positive rather than neutral or, worse yet, hostile. And, positive attitudes about parent involvement seem most likely when those concerned perceive personal benefits as outweighing potential costs (psychological and tangible).

Addressing the invitation problem begins with efforts to ensure most communications and interactions between school personnel and home convey a welcoming tone. It is reasonable to assume that a major way a staff's attitude about home involvement is conveyed is through a school's formal communications with the home and the procedures used to reaching out to specific individuals. In addition, informal interactions between personnel and parents can be expected to reinforce or counter the impact of formal contacts.

Based on these assumptions, a primary focus of interventions designed to address the invitation problem should be on establishing formal mechanisms that (a) convey a general sense of welcome to all parents and (b) extend a personalized invitation to those who appear to need something more. A few comments may help clarify the types of strategies that seem warranted.

(a) <u>General welcoming.</u> Schools have tended to rely heavily on formal dialogues and written statements in interacting and

communicating with parents. As immigrant populations have increased such processes have been adapted to account at least for different languages. For example, attempts have been made to provide office staff with access to resources for communicating with nonEnglish speaking parents. Such resources might include 1) a range of on-call (e.g., by phone) district personnel or community volunteers who speak the necessary languages, 2) a cadre of staff and students at the school who can be called upon when needed, and 3) video and computer programs designed to provide requisite information in specified languages.

Efforts to account for language differences as well as differences in literacy when communicating with parents clearly are essential prerequisites to making the school setting inviting. At the same time, the specific information communicated needs to be expressed in ways that convey positive attitudes toward parents and toward their involvement with the school. More generally, some school staff may require specific training regarding the importance of and how to maintain positive formal and informal interactions with parents.

A special welcoming problem arises around newly enrolled students and their parents -- especially those who enroll during the school year. Schools need to develop delineated steps to greet new families, give them essential orientation information, and encourage them to become involved in on-going activities. Such steps might include a "Welcome Packet for Newcomers" and introductory conferences with the principal, the student's

teacher, other staff resources, and parent representatives -- with emphases both on welcoming and involving them.

(b) Special invitations. Invitations home come in two forms: 1) the type of general communications suggested above (e.g., mass distribution of flyers, newsletters, classroom announcements, form letters) and 2) special, personalized contacts (e.g., personal notes from the teacher; invitations a student makes and takes home; interchanges at school, over the phone, or during a home visit). Parents who do not respond to repeated general invitations to become involved may not appreciate what is available, or there may be obstacles to their involvement. Whatever the reasons, the next logical step is to extend special invitations and increase personalized contact.

Special invitations can range from simple approaches, such as a note or a call, to cost intensive processes, such as a home visit. These are directed at designated individuals and are intended to overcome personal attitudinal barriers and can be used to elicit information about persisting personal and impersonal barriers. For example, one simple approach is to send a personal request to designated parents. The request may invite them to a specific event (e.g., a parent-teacher conference, a school performance involving their child, a parenting workshop, a parent support group), or it may ask for greater involvement at home to facilitate their child's learning (e.g., providing enrichment opportunities or basic help with homework). If the parents still are not responsive, the next special invitation

might call for a "RSVP" and ask for an indication of any obstacles interfering with involvement.

When those at home do indicate obstacles, the problem moves beyond invitations. Overcoming personal and impersonal barriers requires facilitative strategies.

(3) Facilitating involvement. As with the invitation step, intervention strategies to facilitate involvement range from general institutional mechanisms to special personalized procedures and can be approached sequentially. The sequence begins with general strategies to inform, encourage, provide support for overcoming barriers, and so forth. For example, most schools recognize the need to send frequent reminders, provide child care, and accommodate a variety of parent schedules in establishing parent activities. Beyond addressing such impersonal barriers, general facilitation includes (a) ensuring there are a variety of ways to participate, (b) sanctioning home participation in any option and to the degree feasible (e.g., legitimizing initial minimal degrees of involvement and frequent changes), (c) accounting for cultural and individual diversity, (d) enabling participation of those with minimal skills, and (e) providing support to improve participation skills. In all these facilitative efforts, parents who already are involved could play a major role.

At this point, it seems relevant to reemphasize the importance of not thinking of all parent involvement as school-based. In particular, the prime involvement of parents who work

all day may be in helping their child with homework. This may be an especially fruitful area in which to facilitate a home-school collaboration through establishing good channels of communication and a supportive working relationship.

For many, the general strategies already described will be sufficient. For some, however, additional outreach and support will be necessary. In this regard, it may be best to start with individuals who seem somewhat approachable and whose obstacles are not intractable, and then to move on to others as soon as feasible.

Personalized interventions might focus, for example, on a parent's negative attitude toward participating in existing options (e.g., viewing none as worth the time or effort or viewing the school as hostile, controlling, or indifferent). If a parent is extremely negative, exceptional efforts may be required before s/he will perceive the school as supportive and view involvement as personally beneficial.

In cases where a parent's negative attitude stems from skill deficits (e.g., doesn't speak English, lacks skills to help with homework), the option of a skill group is a relatively easy one to offer. The larger facilitative problem, however, is to do so in a way that minimizes stigma and maximizes intrinsic motivation. Some reluctant parents may be reached, initially, by offering them an activity designed to give them additional personal support, such as a mutual interest group composed of parents with the same cultural background or a mutual support

(self-help) group (e.g., Simoni & Adelman, 1990). Such groups might even meet away from the school at a time when working parents can participate. (The school's role would be to help initiate the groups and provide consultation as needed.)

(4) Maintaining involvement. As difficult as it is to involve some homes initially, maintaining their involvement may be even a more difficult matter. Maintaining involvement can be seen as a problem of maintaining and enhancing intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Extrapolating from available research on intrinsic motivation, three strategies for maintaining involvement seem basic: (a) continuing to provide and vary a range of valued ways individuals can be involved, (b) facilitating their decision making among available options -- including decisions to add or move from one to another, and (c) providing continuous support for learning, growth, and success (including feedback about how involvement is personally benefitting the participant). Beyond specific strategies, however, maintaining involvement may depend on whether the school staff, involved parents, and students pursue the full range of intervention steps and do so in ways that create a psychological sense of community.

Concluding Comments

As graphically summarized in Figure 2, schools that are determined to enhance home involvement must be clear as to their intent and the forms of involvement they want to foster. Then, they must establish and maintain mechanisms to carry out major

intervention steps and strategies (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

An intervention perspective underscores that intervening to enhance home involvement in schools and schooling is as complex as any other psychological and educational intervention. Clearly, such activity requires considerable time, space, materials, and competence, and these ingredients are purchased with financial resources. Basic staffing must be underwritten (i.e., additional staff will be needed or else teachers, specialists, and administrators will need "released" time). Efforts to accommodate parent schedules by offering workshops and parent-teacher conferences in the evening and during weekends are likely to produce staff demands for compensatory time off or overtime pay. Furthermore, if such interventions are to be planned, implemented, and evaluated effectively, those given the responsibility will require instruction, consultation, and supervision.

The success of programs to enhance home involvement in schools and schooling is first and foremost in the hands of policy makers. If increased home involvement in schools is to be more than another desired but unachieved aim of educational reformers, policy makers must understand the nature and scope of what is involved. A comprehensive intervention perspective makes it evident that although money alone cannot solve the problem,

money is a necessary prerequisite. It is patently unfair to hold school personnel accountable for yet another major reform if they are not given the support necessary for accomplishing it. In an era when new sources of funding are unlikely, it is clear that such programs must be assigned a high priority and funds must be reallocated in keeping with the level of priority. To do less is to guarantee the status quo.

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Note

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TYPES	FORMS: Attitudes	Mechanisms/ Skills	Practicalities
Institutional	e.g., school administration is hostile toward increasing home involvement	e.g., insufficient staff assigned to planning and implementing ways to enhance home involvement; no more than a token effort to accommodate different languages	e.g., low priority given to home involvement in allocating resources such as space, time, money
Impersonal	e.g., home involvement suffers from benign neglect	e.g., rapid influx of immigrant families overwhelms school's ability to communicate and provide relevant home involvement activities	e.g., school lacks resources; majority in home have problems related to work schedules, child care, transportation
Personal	e.g., specific teachers and parents who feel home involvement is not worth the effort or feel threatened by such involvement	e.g., specific teachers and parents who lack relevant language and interpersonal skills	e.g., specific teachers and parents who are too busy or lack resources

Figure 1. General types and forms of barriers to home involvement.

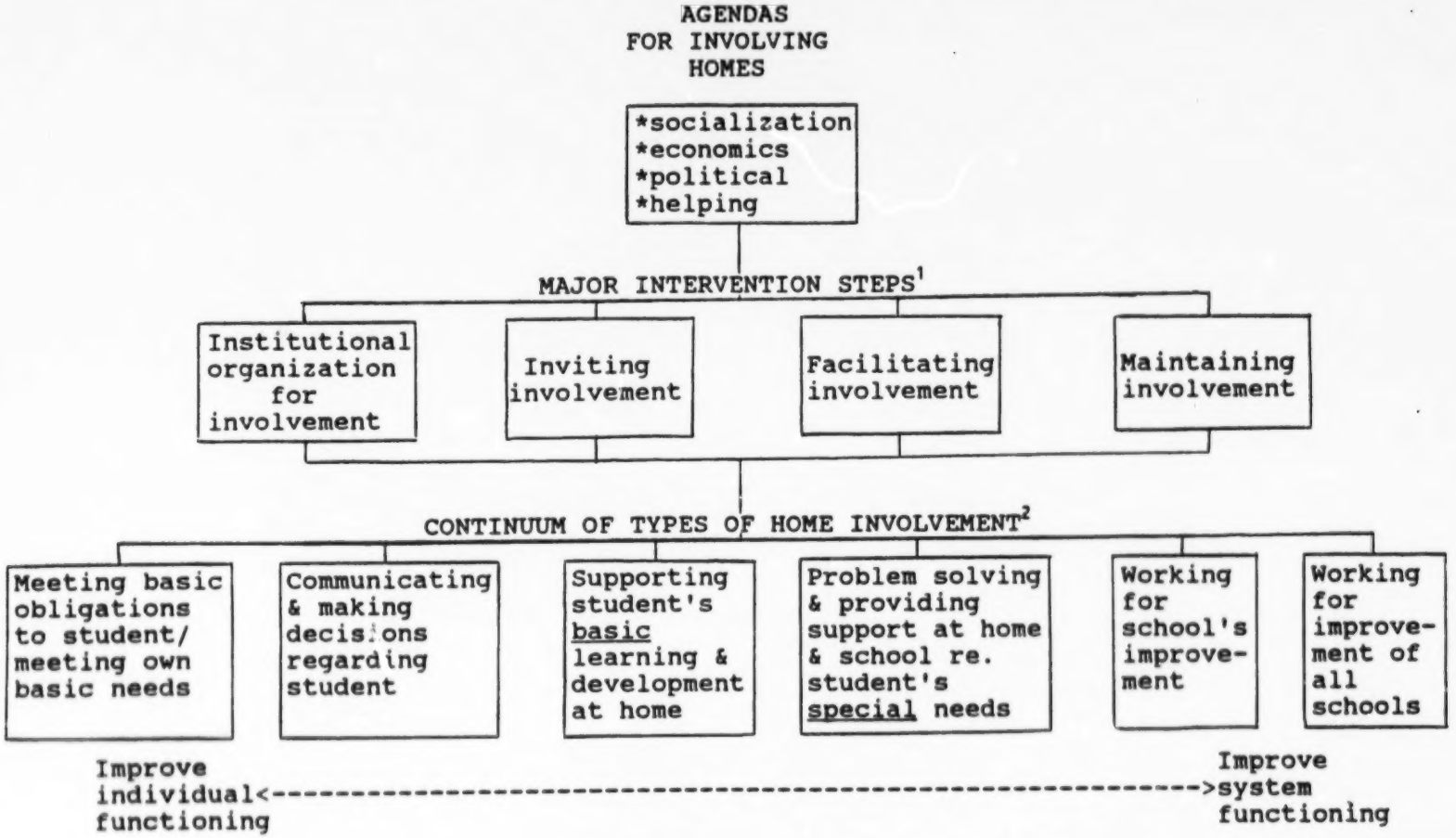

Figure 2. Enhancing home involvement: Intent, intervention tasks, and a continuum of ways homes might be involved.

[1]While the tasks remain constant, the breadth of intervention focus can vary over three sequential sets of strategies: (1) broadband contacts -- focused on those who are receptive, (2) personalized contacts -- added for those who need a little inducement, and (3) intensive special contacts -- added for those who are extremely unreceptive.

[2]Besides participating in different types of home involvement, homes differ in the frequency, level, quality, and impact of their involvement.